

Primary Education: Problems and Purpose

A Comment

Krishna Kumar

LOW rate of retention in the primary school classes in India is often attributed to the view of education held by the parents of drop-out children. Amiya Rao ('Primary Education: Problems and Purpose', p 503, March 8, 1980) refers to a survey, carried out by the Delhi Municipal Corporation, which indicates that the majority of children who stay away from school do so because of their parents' indifference. Apparently supporting this conclusion of the survey, Rao says;

Any scheme for universal primary education, to be successful, needs the parents' co-operation. But the parent must be able to see that the child is learning not merely to read and write, but also to be useful to the society and to the family and will, after a while, begin to earn; the parent must see that the child is not being led up a blind alley.

The solution to this problem of parents' apathy towards school education, according to Rao, is to include in the curriculum some kind of training that will ultimately lead to a vocation or a trade. This step, he believes, will change parents' attitude towards education.

There are at least two instances in our recent educational history which show that drop-out rates cannot be lowered simply by including some vocational training in the curriculum. The first time this remedy was tried on an extensive scale was in the fifties, under the auspices of Basic Education. Schools in which it was tried included vocational training in their curriculum, and in many cases the children who participated in the training process actually earned some money for their schools.¹ The scheme, however, did not seem to have any impact on the rate of retention in the primary or secondary school. Later, in the period following the Kothari Commission's report, 'work-experience' became the watchword of change in education in many parts of the country. Till now, inclusion of work experience in the curriculum has shown no impact on retention. These two experiments should be adequate evidence that it is a mistake to see vocational training as a panacea, for high drop-out rates. This is not to imply that we can neglect other positive aspects of vocational training.

The argument, that parents do not send their children to school because they perceive school education as useless, is based on the view that parents exercise a *deliberate* choice in withholding their children from school, and therefore the responsibility or blame for their children's lack of schooling rates with them. This view comes from the 'blame the victim' ideology that used to underline much of the developmental sociology of the sixties. While many developmentalists seem to have abandoned the view since then, it continues to have enthusiastic adherents in education. In the context of primary school education in India, the view obviously starts on the assumption that adequate facilities are available for every child in the country, and that if many children are not using these facilities fully it is a matter of choice made by their parents. How false this assumption is need not be testified further than by quoting Amiya Rao's own description of municipal schools in Delhi — a city which is a highly privileged part of the country:

Even in Delhi the municipal primary schools in the poorest areas are in ragged tents, without lavatories, without drinking water, without a blackboard: in one, the corrugated sheet which serves as its compound wall also serves as a blackboard.

Undoubtedly, parents' need for help in family life and at work can determine a child's attendance at school. Studies (e.g., Mamdani, 1972) have shown how enormous a contribution Indian children make to family finances and parents' well-being by doing the daily chores, looking after babies, providing additional labour at work, and often by earning money independently. These roles which children play in India have nothing whatsoever to do with their parents' attitudes. They are simply a part of the structure of relationships in majority of India's families and the material social conditions which create these relationships. Therefore, if the performance of these roles conflicts with school attendance, the conflict cannot be attributed to parents' attitudes. In a study of wastage and stagnation in primary and middle schools, Sharma and Sapra (1969) found that "according to drop-

outs' parents, the economic backwardness of the family and pupils' poor-achievement in studies are the two most important causes, while parental indifference towards education is the least important." (p 101).

The conflict between the material conditions in which the majority in our society live and the culture of the classroom has many dimensions. One of these dimensions is the structure of relationships in the classroom; between children of upper castes and classes, and the children of lower and oppressed classes; and the teacher's behaviour towards these two categories of children. Curricular demands and expectations of the school system, and the behaviours that elicit positive expectations from the teacher, are traditionally associated with the occupations and the life style of the upper castes. School teaching, traditionally an occupation of the Brahmin and the Kayastha, does not seem to have reached very deeply the lower caste strata of our society, even as the expansion of the profession in the relatively privileged castes has been considerable. During professional training, our teachers are exposed extensively to theories of child psychology and lesson planning, but hardly ever to the problems of communication across caste, class, and sex differences. Bernstein's work in England (1971) shows a strong connection between language, behaviour, and class background of the child on one hand, and school achievement on the other. Seating pattern in the classroom and questioning and answering opportunity were two other aspects the I think (on the basis of my observations in Madhya Pradesh classrooms) are related to pupils' caste and class background.

When a child drops out of the school, this action of the child indicates his/her response to the school just as much as it indicates the school systems response to the child. If we take a look at our entire education system today, in terms of its capacity to accommodate students at different upward stages, it will not be difficult for us to notice that the system depends for its survival on the mechanisms it has for dropping children off—either by openly declaring them failures or by making it impossible for them to cope with its demands. Our secondary school system would simply collapse if fewer children were dropping out at the primary stage. The growth rate of enrolments in universities and colleges has been on the decline for several years.

The school is perhaps the single

largest source of stress in the life of our children, and it is a matter of little wonder that many children fail to cope with the stress. The stress comes from the high rate of failure and the low chance of survival.³ In a highly competitive society that we are today, the school actively promotes a desire to leave others behind for the sake of self-survival. As one learns and struggles to leave others behind, one is constantly dogged by the fear of being left behind, and ultimately oneself left out at some stage. The failure referred to here is not only what examination results award to large numbers of students at higher stages, but also the unhappy failure that children experience in their daily life and communication with the teacher in the classroom.

Notes

- 1 See the Report of (Hindi) Basic

Education Evaluation Committee (Convener; G Ramachandran), Ministry of Educational and Scientific Research, Government of India. 1957.

- 2 I have discussed this aspect in detail in "*Raj, Samaj aur Shiksha* (Hindi) New Delhi. Macmillan, 1978.

References

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Mamdani, Mahmood. "The Myth of Population Control; Family, Caste, and Class in an Indian Village", New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.

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years age-group after death and culling (with limited scope).

The average age of calving for indigenous variety has been taken as four and a half years, thereby 50 per cent of the animals of four to five years age-group will calve and replace the milch cows leaving behind 13 heifers.

So, ignoring the male population, 100 indigenous cows will have 127 female followers.

On the other hand, in Table 2 multiplication rate of 100 cross-bred cows has been shown and, in the third year, if no culling and selection is practised, it will have 45 female calves in the age group of 0-1 year, 36 female calves in 1-2 years age-group, and 18 female calves in 2-3 years age-group.

As mentioned earlier, since the age of the first calving of cross-bred animals are two and a half years, 50 per cent of the heifers of 2-3 years age-group will calve and replace cross-bred milch cows leaving behind 18 heifers in the age-group.

However, the higher reproductive efficiency in practice will give a scope of selection and culling for economy leaving behind a replacement rate of 25 per cent. Thereby, if efficient culling is practised, the follower stock will be 33 female calves in the age-group of 0-1 year, 28 female calves in the age-group of 1-2 years, and 13 female calves to the age-group of 2-3 years. Thus, the total number of followers at any given time (if increase in number of milch animals is not envisaged), will be 74 only.

Operation Flood II : Some Constrains and Implications

A Comment

H Guha

SURINDER SINGH'S article, 'Operation Flood: Some Constrains and Implications' (October 27, 1979) is very thought-provoking. However, being directly involved in cross-breeding of cattle with exotic germ plasm for the last 22 years, I have some reservation on the conclusion drawn — particularly regarding the severity of the shortage of feed resulting from low production of feed and rapid increase in number of cross-bred milch cattle.

The rate of reproduction and production of cross-bred animals, along with other environmental factors, are to be taken into consideration in drawing such a conclusion.

For example, let us take indigenous Haryana-type cows, having approximately 350 kg body weight. The calving interval is about 18 months and the overall per head per day production is 1.5 kg. When such a cow is crossed with exotic dairy bulls the average body weight comes to about 400 kg, with a calving interval of 13 months and per head per day production of about 4 kg. In both cases, average fat percentage will be around 4.5.

In Table 1, the multiplication rate of the indigenous cow is given. It may please be seen that about 60 per cent will calve each year and in the

fifth year 100 indigenous cows will have 33 female calves in the age-group of 0-1 year, 27 female calves in 1-2 years age-group, 27 female calves in 2-3 years age-group, 27 in 3-4 years age-group, and 13 female calves in 4-5

TABLE 1: MULTIPLICATION RATE OF COWS WITH FEMALE FOLLOWERS

Cow	Female Followers → Age-Group in Years					Remarks
	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	
First 100	33					Indigenous cows = 100 Following = 127 Average M/D = 1.5 kg Milk for 100 indigenous cows = 150 kg/day
Second 100	33	27				
Third 100	33	27	27			
Fourth 100	33	27	27	27		
Fifth 100	33	27	27	27	13	

TABLE 2: MULTIPLICATION RATE OF CROSS-BRED COWS WITH FEMALE FOLLOWERS

Cow	Female Followers Only					Remarks
	0-1	1-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	
First 100	45					Cross cows = 100 Followers after selection = 74 Average M/D = 4 kg Milk for 100 cross-cows = 400 kg/day
Second 100	45	36				
Third 100	45	36	18			
Retention 100 after culling third year	33	28	13			